

In support of a comprehensive, non-motorized local and state-wide trail system.

The recreational value of non-motorized trails is well known; and it is demonstrated by their popularity and use wherever they have been built. As a cyclist, it is a joy to ride through towns and see families on bicycle outings or to see parents pushing their children in strollers making use of the trails. I have ridden most of the major trails in Michigan purely for the recreational value, and there are many others who have used their local trails on a regular basis. Of course it is not JUST bicyclists who enjoy the trails. I regularly see walkers, joggers, roller bladers and even amigos piloted by seniors with limited mobility - just out for the sheer enjoyment that trail use provides.

In a nation and state not noted for its health, the health improvement component of the use of non-motorized trails is also beneficial, both short-term and long-term. Every one of those folks who are out jogging, walking, cycling - however they are using the trails - are maintaining or improving their own personal health. The long-term benefits of a healthy population are well known and widely understood.

Trails also provide a significant component to transportation - especially in urban centers. It is not unusual to see trail users who are shopping, going to or from work, running errands - or doing other "chores" via the local trail - and avoiding use of their car or other motorized transportation.

In my own experience as a cyclist and trail user, I can attest to the positive values that non-motorized trails provide in Michigan and in other states. As a member of the Board of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, I have seen countless examples to support these benefits; and as a long-time member of the Steering Committee of the Friends of the Flint River Trail, I have been closely involved with supporting trail use and witnessing the benefits of the Flint River Trail.

**The economic impact of non-motorized trails is less well known,
but it is equally important - and very clear!**

Let me give you some examples - primarily anecdotal - of the positive economic impact that trails have provided. Some of these are personal - some not.

- A number of times over the past few years, I have driven to South Haven to ride the Kal-Haven Trail (Kalamazoo - South Haven). I meet my son and his family who drive down from Grand Rapids. We rent two motel rooms for two nights, purchase a total of 24 meals, gasoline, snacks and water in Kalamazoo / South Haven or in one or more of the small towns along the trail.

- I have essentially repeated the Kal-Haven Trail experience with several family members over several years on the Mackinac Bridge Ride - four to seven people for two nights along with the associated meals and other expenses - in Mackinac City, St. Ignace and/or on Mackinac Island.
- On the Paint Creek Trail (Rochester to Lake Orion) there are two restaurants on the trail in Rochester. I often ride that trail on a Saturday afternoon. At a time when restaurants are traditionally "dead" it is not uncommon to see several tables of cyclists eating a late lunch or enjoying a beer on the terrace. Most years, I will ride that trail two or three times and - along with friends - purchase lunch along the trail each time.
- On that same trail, realtors have indicated that homes on the trail typically sell for about 10% more than comparable homes "off the trail". Given that these are homes in the \$350,000 and up range, that is a huge economic benefit to the homeowner and for the local taxing units!
- On the Pere Marquette Trail (Midland to Clare); a small diner in the town of Sanford indicates that about a third of their business - year round - comes from trail users. In the town of Coleman, also on the Pere Marquette Trail, a new restaurant was opened a few years ago because of the proximity to the trail; and a small local hardware converted a portion of their floor space to a bike shop - which has worked well for them.

The economic impact is greatest when there are extensive and connected trail systems. The Genesee County Regional Trail Council envisions such a system throughout the county and will connect with the surrounding counties, to the Polly Ann Trail in Lapeer and Oakland Counties; the Pere Marquette and/or the Saginaw St Charles Trail to the north; and to the Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail to the west. The Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance proposes a connected trail system across the entire state. There are many examples of the economic impact of more extensive trail systems.

- A group of nine Flint area friends went to the Dayton / Zenia, Ohio area for the express purpose of riding the extensive trail system there. They rented five motel rooms for three nights - 15 room-occupancies in all. They purchased, in addition to many incidentals, approximately 45 meals in the area - along with snacks, gasoline, water, etc. That represents a total expenditure in excess of \$2,100 - for the sole purpose of utilizing the non-motorized trail system.
- Along with a group of about 15 people, I rode the 250 mile Katy Trail in Missouri - basically extending from Kansas City to St. Louis. We stayed in Bed & Breakfasts, ate at local restaurants, made many incidental purchases, and utilized a local shuttle service to take us back to our cars at the starting point. Virtually every little "railroad town" along the way was revitalized by the development of the trail after the rail line had been abandoned. New motels, restaurants and bike shops had been built where none existed before. Old

large homes and storefronts that had been virtually abandoned had been refurbished as Bed & Breakfasts or Inns; as restaurants, ice-cream shops; as bicycle repair shops, or as souvenir shops.

I could add dozens of additional examples. It is important to note that I do not consider myself an avid bicyclist. On many of my cycling excursions I have met people whose experiences paralleled or exceeded mine. At the local level, with just a modest trail, there is a significant economic impact. Local bicycle shops will tell you that the efforts of the Friends of the Flint River Trail in promoting cycling has had a positive impact on their business. The ice-cream shop in the Village of Genesee - just past the end of our Flint River Trail has benefited substantially from patronage by our riders.

While the recreational, health and transportation value of non-motorized trails is clearly evident; the economic impact is often over-looked. That does not make it any less significant. A well developed and marketed comprehensive trail system - whether it is a County-wide one or a state-wide system - can contribute to the local economy as well as to the state's attraction as a tourist destination. I want to strongly support and encourage the development of a state-wide non-motorized trail system as part of a tourism package and as part of a more general economic development package. Studies show that the cost of trails is easily recuperated over a relatively short term with tourist, real estate and commercial impact.

I have included some examples of studies that clearly demonstrate the economic value of a well developed non-motorized trail system. Many more such studies are available.

Jack Minore

Flint River Watershed Coalition: Board Chair

Friends of the Flint River Trail: Steering Committee

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance: Board Member

jacksonmin@aol.com

610 Commonwealth Ave

Flint, Michigan 48503

(810) 235-1490

